NAMBLA topics no. 1

Anatomy of a Media Attack

NAMBLA
topics

Number 1

NAMBLA Topics is published four times a year by the North American Man/Boy Love Association.

Each issue focuses on a particular topic related to man/boy love.

The views expressed here are those of the writers, and do not necessarily reflect positions of NAMBLA.

Your ideas and comments are welcome.

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Introduction

NAMBLA and man/boy love are rarely taken seriously by the American media. NAMBLA's existence is used only for its shock value. We seldom have a chance to respond. Reports in the gay press are a partial exception. The following article and subsequent letters illustrate how rapid and appropriate response by NAMBLA spokespeople and others can change a stereotyped, unfavorable portrayal into a much more positive presentation. Although any knowledgeable reader can sense the unfairness of the article, we have felt it useful to discuss in detail some of its major flaws. NAMBLA needs to successfully articulate its positions in a manner that can be heard above the crowd.

This issue of *NAMBLA Topics* reprints what was presented as an objective discussion of NAMBLA and the responses of NAMBLA members and others. In February 1995, a Philadelphia gay newspaper, *Au Courant*, published an article by Franklin Sellers, a free-lance journalist. This was followed by several spirited letters to the editor responding to the article.

Au Courant is the less well known of the two weekly gay newspapers in Philadelphia. It is generally given away free in gay bars, bookstores, and other gay-oriented businesses. The major gay paper in town, the *Philadelphia Gay News* (*PGN*), seldom mentions NAMBLA at all due to the political aspirations of its owner/publisher. In the past, *Au Courant* has printed articles both favorable and hostile to NAMBLA.

The article differs from similar "objective articles" in the mainstream press in that it must consider the viewpoints of gay and lesbian readers. (Although formally concerned with both women and men, the articles and advertising in *Au Courant* primarily deal with the gay male community.) Although the author doesn't deal with it at length, he does note that the language and arguments used against NAMBLA are the same as those against right-wing groups.

The article has an appearance of objectivity in that the reporter "talked to both sides." However, the arguments against NAMBLA are put in mouths of authorities, specifically the director and a therapist at the Joseph Peters institute in Philadelphia. As Bill Andriette notes in his letter, which follows this article, similar authorities are available in support of man/boy love but were not used.

Throughout the article, the author commits the logical error of the excluded middle. Simply stated, his argument is that "All NAMBLA members are pedophiles, and that all pedophiles injure children. And since everyone agrees that injury to children is

bad, all NAMBLA members are bad."

There are problems with all stages of this argument. The author first defines *pedophilia* as the eroticization of youth, and sex between adults and underage males. As Bill Andriette's letter points out, there is a technical definition of pedophilia by the American Psychiatric Association, and this isn't it. Also the author seems to hedge on his own definition where he refers to the sexual attraction of many adults to teenagers as a "gray area." Some of NAMBLA's members could be properly described as pedophiles, some not. NAMBLA has never identified itself as a pedophile organization since it is concerned only with man/boy relationships and many of the relationships it supports are not pedophilic.

The author attempts to support his statement that man/boy sex is bad by stating that the young partners involved suffer emotional problems. He attempts to deal with the counter-argument that the views of his experts are the result of them studying only children with emotional problems by saying, "Though such children [perfectly happy in man/boy love relationships] may exist, there is also the possibility that just because a child doesn't report such a relationship or seek psychotherapy, that doesn't inherently guarantee that the child is emotionally well balanced and content with the relationship." This doesn't prove the opposite, either. Bill Andriette's letter quotes some of the abundant evidence of positive relationships. Further references are available at the end of this issue.

In brief, the argument that all man/boy relationships are pedophilic, and that all man/boy sexual relationships are injurious is self-serving claptrap dished out by experts with a professional and monetary interest in having people believe it. Child sexual abuse happens. Whenever it happens it is bad. But labelling relationships abusive when they are not is also bad and hurts the boys and men involved. A group fighting the involuntary psychiatric commitment of youth reports that some young men remain committed because they refuse to consider their relations with older men abusive.

One of Franklin Sellers's main concerns in his article was dealing with the myth of the homosexual as child molester. George Chauncey, noted gay scholar, in a lecture he gave November 10, 1994 at the New York Academy of Medicine (entitled "The Psychiatric Construction of the Image of the Homosexual as a Psychopathic Child Molester in Post-War America") discussed the 1940s construction of the homosexual as a pathological child molester. He outlined a systematic media campaign identifying

homosexuals as deviants and potential child murderers. This was done by placing homosexuals on a spectrum of perversion or deviance, and then stating that a homosexual could slide down to child rapist without warning. He quoted from a 1947 *Collier's* magazine which described a burly man in a flowered shirt prowling the streets for a sexual partner. The article suggested that if he did not find a partner, he would be apt to turn to a small child, drag him to a basement, and rape and kill him. Sellers's experts, by referring to pedophiles as "incredibly disturbed," wants to keep that stereotype for man/boy lovers, but exclude good homosexuals.

Although of the stereotype of the homosexual and man/boy lover as child molester is wrong, the truth is complex. In various cultures and across human history, homosexuality has been documented in two main forms. One is gender crossing, as in the drag queens today, or the shamans of Native American culture. Then there are intergenerational relationships, such as those that occurred in classical Greek, Arab, Persian, and mediaeval Japanese cultures. The ideal of relationships between same-age, same-sex individuals living in a community of other such couples is quite recent. Homosexuality and man/boy love are inseparable. David DiAngelis's letter (below) highlights

'In various cultures and across human history, homosexuality has been documented in two main forms. One is gender crossing, as in the drag queens today, or the shamans of Native American culture. Then there are intergenerational relationships, such as those that occured in classical Greek, Arab, Persian, and mediaeval Japanese cultures. The ideal of relationships between same-age, same-sex individuals living in a community of other such couples is quite recent. Homosexuality and man/boy love are inseparable.'

'Sexual abuse happens. Whenever it happens it is bad. But labelling relationships abusive when they are not is also bad and hurts the boys and men involved.'

an average gay man who was involved in a man/boy relationship when he was younger.

Sellers seems to have problems with informed consent and power differential. Of course, if a difference in wealth, age, and social status made sexual relations impossible, almost all heterosexual relationships would have to be outlawed. The problem with the notion of "informed consent," as Bill Andriette's letter points out, is it leads to ever more refined and complex definitions of what constitutes informed, and is not actually useful in deciding whether or not a specific relationship is helpful or harmful for the persons concerned.

Sellers also seems highly confused as to results of man/boy relationships. He has one of his experts stating that "some of the children, when they become adults, become pedophiles themselves." Todd, a "typical victim" Sellers quotes, states that he believes a result of his experiences with older men comes his attraction to older men, bigger and hairier than he is, and his sexual role-playing activities wherein he once again becomes the little boy. The article concludes with a quote from an unnamed man in his late 20s, which starts out, "In their formative years, every child's mind is a clean slate. Anything can influence his or her 'leanings' or 'tendencies.'" This is the theory on which the religious right bases its campaign to ban lesbians and gays as teacher and adoptive parents. It's also extremely dubious, as most lesbian and gays had heterosexual parents.

In truth, the origin of sexual orientation is obscure and probably quite complex. Likewise, one's mental health and attitude towards sexuality is dependent on many things, including positive or negative sexual experiences, but is seldom definitively influenced by any single factor. ■

— Bob Rhodes

The Article

The following article appeared in Au Courant, *volume 13, number 13, January 31-February 6 1995. Permission was granted by* Au Courant *to reprint the article and responses here.*

Man/Boy Love: A Look at the Gay Community's Last Taboo—Pedophilia And Eroticizing Boys

by Franklin Sellers

There are very few subjects within the gay and lesbian community that are perceived as taboo. But such is the case of pedophilia—the eroticization of youth and sex between adults and under-age minors.

Opponents of gay civil rights have long since linked the gay movement to pedophile groups because both camps represent a deviation from the heterosexual norm.

The group most known for furthering the pedophile cause is the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), an organization which is trying to change the popular concept of pedophiles as perverted child molesters.

In the process of seeking their own political and social liberation, NAMBLA, which fights solely for the right of men to have sex with boys, has split much of the gay community, which wrestles with the hypocrisy of oppressing another oppressed group—particularly when the issue regards the choice of how to use one's own body.

NAMBLA believes the gay rights movement is indebted to their organization, claiming their members have fought on the front lines from Stonewall to San Francisco. Many gay activists, however, don't believe NAMBLA has been quite so instrumental in their struggles for civil rights—or they simply don't care; they want no association with pedophiles.

Right-wing preachers and politicians, however, are having a field day with NAMBLA: encouraging the masses (read: voters) to believe that homosexuality and pedophilia have always been synonymous.

And if the American middle-class doesn't buy into that stereotype, they're still unlikely to embrace gay rights if gay organizations promote pedophilia.

As NAMBLA continues its efforts to ride the coattails of the gay rights movement, it hurts the effort's progression. Last year the United Nations threatened to kick out the International Lesbian and Gay Association if ILGA didn't expel NAMBLA. Although ILGA obeyed, it was subsequently ousted when the UN discovered it harbored another pedophile group—this time, from Ger-

many.[1]

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in Washington DC took a firm stand last May 26: "The board of directors... condemns all abuse of minors, both sexual and any other kind, perpetrated by adults. Accordingly, NGLTF condemns the organizational goals of NAMBLA and any other such organization."

"Numerous studies have shown that the vast majority of child molestation is committed by heterosexual men, usually with members of their own family," NGLTF added.

For those not sure what NAMBLA stands for, the group makes its position clear in its newsletter, the *NAMBLA Bulletin*: "We work to organize support for boys and men who have or desire consensual sexual and emotional relationships.... NAMBLA condemns sexual abuse and all forms of coercion. We insist there is a distinction between coercive and consensual sex."

NAMBLA argues that emotional problems children suffer after having had a sexual relationship with an adult (which the group calls "intergenerational sex") is not always a result of that child's emotional inability to handle such a relationship, but a result of society's condescension.

This argument is similar to one used by many lesbians and gay men against their own oppression; however, queer activists speak for themselves as adults. In NAMBLA, however, the men speak for the boys. (How many boys are actually in NAMBLA, if any, has always been a mystery—only men march behind any NAMBLA banner.)

NAMBLA did not return any phone calls to discuss these issues.

"Children aren't in a position to make informed consent about sexual relationships," said Darlene Pessein a therapist at the Joseph Peters Institute in Philadelphia, the oldest sex offender treatment clinic in the US.

Pessein, who has treated sex abuse victims for more than 12 years, said the overwhelming number of children who have had sex with adults suffer long-term emotional problems which they may exhibit externally. She said self-mutilation is one way children show they're "so horrified, (filled with) self-loathing and self-hate."

Pessein said there's a power differential in an adult/child relationship; some of the children, when they become adults, become pedophiles themselves as

[1] This is a factual error. The group in question, the Munich-based Verein für Sexuelle Gleichberechtigung (Society for Sexual Equality), is not a pedophile organization. While the VSG hosts an independent discussion group on pederasty, its major projects are lobbying for a gay domestic partnership law and establishing a memorial at Dachau for homosexuals killed by the Nazis.

"an attempt to regain some sense of control over a situation over which they had none.... Even the kids we see as young as three and five tend to be behaving in a compulsive sexual manner, such as masturbating and acting out sex games with dolls.

"Pedophilia is about control," Pessein said—a hypothesis supported by her colleague, Dr. Robert Prentky, the Institute's clinical director who has spent years treating sex abusers.

"The identity of children as sex objects has much more to do with the inability of the adult to engage with peers (emotionally and sexually)" Prentky said, describing the condition as a "cognitive distortion... an irrational attitude that serves to justify the (sexual) attitudes and sustain (them). 'The kids like it. It's all society's fault.'"

There is the argument that Pessein's and Prentky's views result from studying only children suffering emotional problems, and never encounter those who NAMBLA members claim are perfectly happy in their sexual relationships with adults. Though such children may exist, there is also the possibility that just because a child doesn't report such a relationship or seek psychotherapy, that doesn't inherently guarantee that the child is emotionally well balanced and content with the relationship.

Pedophiles, Prentky said, "are incredibly disturbed" individuals, but should not be thought to be stupid. The *NAMBLA Bulletin* is well written and articulate, for instance, but "some of the brightest (authors), you may even call them geniuses, who have written children's literature, are pedophiles."

Prentky said he's constantly amazed at the "stupidity" of those who ask him if homosexuality and pedophilia are inexorably linked. No more that hetero-

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sexuality, he says. "If someone chooses a heterosexual lifestyle, does that mean they're a pedophile?" he asked.

Prentky questioned the absence of similar groups which would support consensual sexual relationships between men and girls, which poses the question: where are the woman/girl and woman/boy organizations?

Most prominent Center City bookstores, such as Borders, Rizzoli's, Barnes & Noble, and Afterwords, refuse to sell the *NAMBLA Bulletin*, and the pedophilic material they do sell is placed in the psychology section. Their books treat the subject from a research perspective, with the consensus that adult/child sex is sexual abuse. The one exception is [the gay bookstore] Giovanni's Room, which sells similar books, but also pedophilic erotica. Among the latter is the "Getting It On" series, books with colorful covers similar to those on teen romance novels.

"I'm astonished that any self-respecting gay and lesbian bookstore would have [NAMBLA's] crap in it," Prentky said.

Ed Hermance, owner of Giovanni's Room, said one of the reasons he chooses to sell the *NAMBLA Bulletin* and other pedophilic material is because NAMBLA looks at legal issues such as the wide discrepancies in jail sentences between heterosexually oriented child molesters and their gay counterparts, with gay pedophiles receiving longer terms and suffering more beatings and murders while incarcerated.

"Obviously there's a gay issue here," he insists.

Hermance also said that NAMBLA was leading the fight in the controversy over the age of consent, currently 17 in Pennsylvania. But the organization is not quibbling over teenagers, an admitted gray area of sexual attraction for many adults. NAMBLA members are sexually attracted to prepubescent boys.

"[Pedophilia] is not what we're supporting," Hermance said. "We're trying to make information available. People can have it for all kinds of reasons. I encourage people to look at it. They don't have to agree with it."

Inside the *NAMBLA Bulletin* are photos of prepubescent boys, many shirtless, and letters inside written only by NAMBLA members. Editor Bill Andriette writes, "NAMBLA says, 'If you respect the centrality of consent in human interactions, you do not criminalize any consensual sex between adults and children or adolescents.'"

When a member disagrees with Andriette about informed and uninformed consensual sex, Andriette analogizes learning football to sex games between a father and his five-year-old son. In short, Andriette claims that society approves of the father pushing his son toward sports

though the boy didn't know anything about football beforehand. Why, then, Andriette asks, does society condemn the father for teaching his son about sex? Andriette feels that consensual sex is enough, and there should be no legal distinction between informed and uninformed consent. "I think that the concept of 'consent' has almost nothing to contribute to elaborating these issues," he writes.

The *Bulletin* also features a column called "Boy Beat," where writer R. Wilke dishes about the latest gossip on boy celebrities such as Macaulay Culkin, Adam Wylie (age ten) and Eric Lloyd (age eight). Here Wilke writes, "I hope you all caught the November 4th "Picket Fences" episode where (Wylie) is confronted by some fellow students in the boys' restroom at school. (Wylie) reaches down, unzips the fly of his jeans and... proceeds to 'squirt' on them. Alas, the camera angle wasn't low enough."

There's also erotic fiction, a short story called "Look For Me By Moonlight," which plays out Prentky's cognitive distortion argument. In the story a pedophile has just been released from jail, where he was sent after one of his 12-year-old boys hanged himself. The pedophile uses society's attitude to explain away the boy's suicide. To rationalize his theory further, the writer has the boy's ghost play Cupid and hook the narrator up with a new boy.

Possein said the story is an example of externalizing the situation, not accepting any blame but blaming everyone else.

NAMBLA is not alone in its battle, though. One supporter cited in the *Bulletin* is Philadelphia academic Camille Paglia. NAMBLA printed an excerpt from her latest collection of essays, the bestselling *Vamps and Tramps*, wherein Paglia writes, "The narrow political focus of gay activism prevented it from addressing larger questions about sexuality. Pedophilia, for example, is yet another indicator of sexual difference, since it applies only to gay men, never lesbians."

Paglia did not return numerous phone calls requesting that she elaborate on her views concerning NAMBLA or that there have never been any lesbian pedophiles. A spokesperson referred us to her book, but said Paglia was unavailable for comment.

In her book, Paglia writes that "[by] keeping NAMBLA at arms' length, activists apparently think they can broaden their acceptability and sell their agenda, which includes a preposterous demand for openly gay Boy Scout leaders."

Paglia agrees with NAMBLA in that "damage from pedophilic encounters probably comes, as some psychologists suggest, less from the contact itself than from the culturally enforced stress and secrecy surrounding it."

She favors lowering the age of consent to 14 and writes that "we need to reexamine the way bourgeois values of professional job readiness... have curtailed the sexual freedom and self-determination of the young."

Paglia aside, NAMBLA might receive a lukewarm reception in Philadelphia. If there is a local NAMBLA chapter, it's kept such a low profile no one knows it exists. And there's no telling what reception they might ultimately receive if members wished to integrate into local gay organizations.

Rita Adessa, executive director of the Philadelphia Lesbian and Gay Task Force, said PLGTF "has no position [concerning NAMBLA]. Our work is civil rights for gay and lesbian people."

Michael Loturno, one of the co-directors of the Penguin Place Community Center, said NAMBLA has never approached his organization for use of their facilities in the past ten years. If they did, he said, "the board would have to discuss it. I can't decide for the board."

Lofumo said his personal feeling is that "America is a place of ideas, and ideas should be allowed free reign. One of the functions of a community center is for people to discuss ideas."

How would Diversity of Pride, which organizes Philadelphia's gay pride parade and festival, welcome NAMBLA? "I have no idea," said spokesperson Montine D. Ross. "This would be a very difficult decision. The NAMBLA issue is as divisive [in the gay community] as the abortion issue in the feminist community," she said.

PrideFest was equally nonplused. The nonprofit marketing organization encourages organizations to participate in Philadelphia's annual gay pride weekend. "Would we give them the benefit of our advertising dollars?" queried spokesman Craig Hamilton. "It would depend on the kind of event or program they wanted to run. It's a hard question."

NAMBLA espouses the theory that consensual sex between grown men and prepubescent and teenage boys, informed or uninformed, should be legal. NAMBLA also states that the emotional problems boys have as a result of such relationships or encounters are due more so to society's condescending view of pedophilia than the actual sex act itself.

But NAMBLA's statements and views come from men.

Todd's also a man, 33, but he is not a pedophile. Todd was what he called "sexually molested" by two older men when he was younger, "in the range of nine, ten, and 11 years old." Todd is not the man's real name, and the names of the men he was involved with are not real. But history which is real sheds some light on a boy's perspective in

what NAMBLA calls "intergenerational sex."

Todd said both men were about 18 when they first approached him for sex. Todd brushed aside one man, "Jack," but would later enter into a regular sexual relationship with him. The other man, "Harry," was more clever, using what psychologists call softening tactics, such as buying Todd ice cream or other gifts in return for sexual favors.

Todd said he only had about half a dozen sexual encounters with Harry, but those combined with the sexual relationship with Jack, seem to have left a lasting impression.

Harry, a bona fide pedophile in Todd's view, asked the boy to masturbate him when Todd was about ten. "I had no idea what jerking off was," said Todd. "All I know was he said do this and I did and my hand got all wet." Todd said Harry had a "reputation" in the neighborhood, and when he told his mother about his encounters, including an aborted attempt at sodomy, she simply told him to stay away from the man.

Harry lost interest in him as he grew older, Todd said, but Jack "eventually continued these quests on me to the point [that] when I was 15 years old, he was successful."

Todd said the two started having regular sexual encounters, which they still do a couple of times a year. "It was physically a very exciting experience, but it scared me and I was guilt-ridden." He said he doesn't think Jack is a pedophile, but is attracted to teenage boys and men in their early 20s. He stressed, though, that the relationships were never emotional or caring. The men were "primarily using my body for sexual fantasies. I never had a man/boy relationship," Todd said.

He said he personally believes that one of the reasons he responded to the men's approaches is because he was fatherless himself, and took the opportunity "to be wanted by an older man. I was missing a father figure. There was no man in the family."

Todd said he also believes that one significant result of his encounters with the men has been his inability to maintain a stable, one-on-one relationship with another man. Although handsome, sweet-natured, and looking younger than his age, the longest relationship Todd has had so for has lasted only a year. Deep down he said he feels "I trust men and then they [betray that trust and] take advantage of my body."

Todd also said he is very lonely as an adult and still suffers from occasional bouts of guilt and shame as a result of his childhood experiences.

Todd said he gave up questioning whether the pedophilic

encounters influenced his own sexual orientation and has just accepted his homosexuality as an innate part of his being.

He did say, though, that he believes another result of his experiences is his attraction to older men, bigger and hairier than he is, and his sexual role-playing wherein he is once again becomes the little boy.

Another young man in his late 20s said he was sexually molested by an adult male relative during his early childhood. He didn't want to publicly share many details, but did want to make a succinct statement:

"First, as a disclosure, names and labels and making judgment calls, unfortunately, are inseparable evils that we all use and do. What one may consider 'deviant,' for example, another may not. It is a predicament of paradigms and different value systems butting heads that causes tremendous and intolerable tension and friction for everyone involved. But living in our present society, one has to say that there are different degrees of deviance, some are, lighter than others. NAMBLA is on the heavy end.

"In their formative years, every child's mind is a clean slate. Anything can influence his or her 'leanings' or 'tendencies.' Pedophiles are uninvited culprits that influence a child's moral universe and makeup, tainting their moral outlook on life and their version of truth and reality. With such twisted rhetoric as 'sex before eight, before it's too late,' it's understood where NAMBLA stands on the moral/sexual scale. It's a given why there's adamant refusal and intolerance to accept and assimilate NAMBLA into the rest of the gay community. Donned incompatible, they're too antithetical to the 'wholesome' sacrosanct image that our already marginal gay community wants to present/convey to the mainstream. In our present society, to think that an adult molesting a kid is normal and self-righteous is twisted and ludicrous. It's literally and definitively tongue-in-cheek; that is, it's this issue of 'tongue-in-the-cheeks of little chicks' that gets in the way of unity for all parties involved, gay or non.'" ■

The Response

The following letter was published the next week in the "Reader Feedback" section of Au Courant, *Volume 13, Number 14, February 7-13, 1995. It was from a woman who apparently responded in anger that the author failed to suggest that all NAMBLA members be boiled in oil immediately.*

On Pedophilia: Silence Equals Collaboration

To the Editor:

I read with great interest the article titled "Man Boy Love" by Franklin Sellers in the January 31 issue of *Au Courant*, and had to respond. It is a matter of outrage to me that significant portions of the gay and lesbian community, including so-called "leaders" such as Ed Hermance and Rita Adessa, continue to give tacit approval or look the other way while groups like NAMBLA promote the sexual exploitation of children for no other purpose than their own gratification. Like most pedophiles, groups like NAMBLA then try to transfer responsibility for their actions onto the backs of their powerless, voiceless victims.

In case anyone still thinks I am objective about this issue, like hell I am. I'm a lesbian in my late 40s who was victimized as a child/adolescent by several men in my community in just the kind of relationship NAMBLA would label consensual. I make no distinction between same-sex and opposite-sex abusers.

Would I have labeled those "relationships" as abusive as a child? Hell no, they were the only source I had to meet one of the deepest needs of childhood—the need for affection and approval. Did I enjoy the sexual acts I "participated" in? Hell no, I absolutely loathed them. Many times I would scream on the inside "no more, no more." But I could no more reject the sexual overtures of my abusers than my own emotional needs that were being met, however pathetically, by the "relationship."

Did I let the abusers know I didn't want to be sexual? Hell no, I did everything I could to pretend I enjoyed it, since they let me know not so subtly that was what they needed and wanted, and I would do anything necessary to protect the crumbs of affection and approval I was getting.

Did I have any understanding of my conflicted feelings of need, shame, fear and self-loathing? Of course not. Children are incapable of that kind of emotional processing, and the defense I erected to deal with the abuse kept me stunted well into adulthood.

My eyes began to open somewhat in my early 20s, when I confided my early sexual history to a man about my age (describing the

relationships as consensual). He then confided in me that he was attracted to young girls. He told me eagerly how his "radar" honed in on girls like me who would be susceptible to his emotional and sexual manipulation—children who had poor peer relationships, and poor or no relationships with at least one parental figure.

From the contacts I've had over the years, I don't think my experience was unusual. There is no such thing as consensual sex between children and adults. How can a child give informed consent in a relationship where most of the emotional and physical power is on the side of the adult?

In the *Au Courant* article, Giovanni's Room owner Ed Hermance, a significant figure in the gay community, is quoted as saying he stocks pedophilic material to "make information available," ostensibly as a community service.... Tell me you stock this magazine for informational purposes, Ed Hermance, and I'll tell you: you are full of shit up to your eyeballs.

As for the notion that kids who are manipulated into sex with adults are damaged more by society's attitude toward such relationships than by the sexual acts, what bullcrap. If they were not manipulated into such acts by self-serving adults, the damage wouldn't be there to begin with. Yes, children have sexual needs, but those needs can be appropriately met through self-exploration (masturbation) and experimentation with children close to their own age.

Children don't need to learn how to enjoy sex by interacting sexually with adults, they need adults to give them a safe, loving, affirming environment in which they can discover their sexuality as an integrated part of their emotional growth, and at their own pace.

A friend posed an interesting question. Why is it that many gays and lesbians speak out with great force about adult men who become involved in sex with young girls, but consider the same acts with boys as proposed by groups like NAMBLA to be worthy of dialogue as a political issue? I believe that the pedophile predators of NAMBLA find support in our community because they are just as adept at manipulating the oppression sensitivities of gays and lesbians as they are at manipulating children into sexual activity.

It is ironic that the same community leaders who have pressed so forcefully for laws to protect gay and lesbians from discrimination and victimization develop collective laryngitis when it comes to speaking out on the victimization of boys by adult gay males. In the opinion of this decidedly subjective and angry former victim, that silence is tantamount to collaboration.

Judy Antipin
Philadelphia

Four letters were printed the next week, Volume 13, Number 5, February 14-20, 1995. The featured front page article of that issue was titled, "Father Complex: [the TV docudrama] Boys of St. Vincent Looks at Corruption and Child Abuse Within the Church." The article reviewed the two-part film on television based on the sexual abuse of orphans by the Catholic brothers in an orphanage in eastern Canada years ago.

For the record, the author of the following letter wishes to state that he does not believe that all Jews have big noses.

NAMBLA Defends Loving Boys and Big Noses

Dear Editor:

Judy Antipin, who describes herself as a lesbian, sometime prior to her early 20s had relationships with men which were consensual but exploitative. From these experiences she has taken unlimited permission to stereotype and condemn quite different relationships about which she knows nothing and cares less. It is as if she were cheated by someone with a big nose and then believed she knew every thing about Jews, and felt entitled to express all her anger and the frustrations of a less than perfect life against them and even to condemn those who defend them.

I know Judy Antipin only from her letter. From her letter, I know her to be a bigot. She is not different than a racist or an anti-Semite except that she is part of a larger mob and feels entitled to a more self-righteous anger. Some gay men, a brave few, have defended NAMBLA. Most of them have done so because of memories as positive as those of Judy Antipin were negative.

Bob Rhodes
Spokesperson, NAMBLA

Giovanni's Room is Philadelphia's lesbian and gay bookstore and one of the best in the country.

Giovanni's Room Does Not Sell Kiddy Porn

To the Editor:

Judy Antipin, in her letter "On Pedophilia," February 7-13, describes feelingly her victimization as a child/adolescent at the hands of a manipulative adult man. Physical and emotional abuse of anybody is a terrible thing. Members of the staff of Giovanni's Room, myself included, have responded to many people in crisis situations. People come into the store or call, seeking help for all kinds of problems, just because the store has the reputation of helping people. We are glad to provide whatever help we can, though I must admit that our resources and abili-

ties are limited, sometimes leading to the feeling that we cannot give all the help that's needed. Giovanni's Room has supplied material for [sexual abuse] recovery centers all over the East Coast for years, the store having been among the first to recognize the need for supplying materials on this subject.

I hope Judy Antipin's letter will not prevent people from asking us for the help that we can provide.

Another of the services Giovanni's Room provides is as broad an offering of material on subjects of interest especially to lesbians and gay men as possible. Our carrying material does not mean that we endorse the ideas in the material. Our carrying the material means merely that it contributes to the discussion of a subject that our patrons are concerned with. The ruckus over NAMBLA, ILGA, and the UN has been great enough by itself to make it obvious that the lesbian and gay communities need to have information about NAMBLA available to them.

But the discussion of "transgenerational relations," to choose as neutral term as I can find, is much broader than NAMBLA. I ask Judy Antipin and your readers to consider that experiences such as hers, unhappily frequent as they are, are not the only erotic or sexual experiences that children/adolescents have with adults.

The opposite situation—the child/adolescent as manipulator of the adult—is explored in Paul Monette's memoir *Becoming a Man*, and Edmund White's autobiographical novel, *A Boy's Own Story*, to mention only two contemporary gay men's classics. Lots of gay and lesbian literature—from Sappho on—is concerned with what most people call child molesting or pedophilia, though the terms suppress the distinctions between experiences such as Judy Antipin's on the one hand and Edmund White's and Paul Monette's on the other, again to mention only a minimum of kinds of experience.

Judy Antipin may be forgiven her too-broad generalization of her own traumatic experience. But the rest of us are not required to see the world only through her eyes. She thinks *Gayme* magazine exploits the clothed adolescents whose photographs appear in the context of photos of older nudes. To this viewer, none of the photos in the magazine is pornographic. Her description of one photograph as showing a youth with his legs spread and sporting an erection fits only one photo in the magazine, a 19th century photo by the Baron von Gloeden of a young man whose penis is not erect; it's just big. Her comment that the magazine "may have had written material" suggests that her powers of observation are extreme-

ly limited, at least when the subject stimulates her memory of her past trauma. The magazine does indeed have written material, including an article by Harry Hay, the first American-born advocate of gay rights, and a story by the British/Canadian novelist David Watmough. But then she wouldn't know these things when she's operating in a diminished capacity. She makes it sound like the store is selling kiddy porn. We're not and never have. Anyone thinking we do is invited to look at the materials.

Other stores may take the position that they will carry only what they personally support, and that's an interesting if demanding way to operate. But Giovanni's Room carries anti-gay books if they rise to the level of being of interest to at least some of our customers. We carry books on "man/boy love" because the subject is a controversial one in our communities. The store certainly does not take a position as to what is the correct opinion on the subject. We do want to provide the materials for an informed debate. Some people, such as Judy Antipin, cannot profit from the material because they are trapped in their preconceived notions. We are for everybody else.

Thank you,
Ed Hermance,
Owner, Giovanni's Room

A wonderful letter from a non-combatant in this controversy.

Not All Man/Boy Love Is Abusive

To the Editor:

Although I objected to the article "Man/Boy Love" by Franklin Sellers (not the least objection being his lack of journalistic professionalism and the ill-disguised sensationalism), it didn't evoke enough of a response for me to write a letter concerning it. But the subsequent letter to the editor by Judy Antipin, and its hysterical tone, compel me to state the case from "the other side of the fence."

Please, before I go any further, let me emphasize: 1) I am not a pedophile, 2) I have never had sex with anyone under the age of consent; and, 3) the few times that I've had sexual relations with younger men, hovering just above that arbitrarily assigned number (for it varies from nation to nation, even from state to state), each time it was because they actively pursued me. (Has it ever dawned on you, Ms Antipin, that some boys prefer older men? Just as some guys prefer heavy-set men, some women prefer women with unshaven legs, some prefer leather, some prefer silk, ad infinitum?) So please don't scream "He's one of them" and thereby disregard my argument solely on an ad hom-

inem basis.

Between the ages of seven and 16, I had two significant relationships with guys older than me: first at age seven with a lifeguard at the seashore; then with a man in his mid-40s. Both were very fulfilling, both were very rewarding, and neither was in any sense controlling or abusive. Frankly, in both cases, as in most intergenerational relationships, the younger partner has the upper hand, because he can say "no" and if things aren't going the way he wants, he can blow the whistle, leaving his partner dancing before the judge.

What both did do was provide role models for a kid who felt he was an oddity, indeed, an anomaly because of his sexual orientation: seeing that these guys had friends, had jobs, had real lives let me know that although I was, in the eyes of most of society, a pariah, I too could lead a normal life.

Indeed, there was more to it than that. While I was dating the middle-aged man, he took me to museums, to restaurants, to cultural performances at the Academy of Music, to events that neither my school or my family deemed necessary to my upbringing. Is this abusive? He taught me the ways of male-to-male sex (including STD prevention), and never once did he pressure me in bed to do anything that I didn't want to do or have an interest in trying. Is this abusive? Furthermore, when I passed into that rambunctious mid-teen age where I was ready to go out on my own, he hugged me and kissed me and told me to remember always that love is more important than anything in the world (and made me promise to call him if I ever needed his help in any way). Is this abusive? Did my family teach me this? Did the school system teach me this? Three times no.

There are as many different kinds of love as there are different kinds of sexual expression, and what two people do together privately is their business alone until they decide to make it anyone else's. I would not be so foolish as to deny that there are abusive intergenerational relationships; of course there are, just as there are abusive marriage relationships, abusive relationships between men and women, between men and men, and women and women, and between parents and children, so too there will be abusive relationships between older men and younger boys. Do we throw out the baby with the bath water? Or do we try to resolve the situation by teaching our children about themselves (instead of denying their sexuality), by teaching them personal empowerment (instead of telling them they're "too young" to know what they want or to learn about their bodies), by teaching them how to love (instead of how to fear and hate)?

I'm sincerely sorry that Ms Antipin didn't have as rewarding an experience with her early intergenerational relationships as I did; maybe if she had them with women at that time (something that does exist, though the article didn't treat it substantively), she might have found them more rewarding. I do wonder if her anger and disgust and frustration weren't spawned, not by the differences in age between her and her partners, but by the fact that they were not her sexual preference?

As we've all learned over the last 25 or so year of the gay rights movement, behind closet doors fester discontent. To sweep the reality of intergenerational love into the dark will bode no better, in the long run, than all the hundreds and hundreds, indeed, thousands, of years of gay repression.

Finally, let me express kudos to Ed Hermance for, once again, providing our community with a free and open distribution of literature without bowing to the "political correctness" of one faction or another. If he bowed to every personal whim, it would be a store full of... empty shelves.

David DiAngelis
Philadelphia

NAMBLA spokesperson Bill Andriette's letter speaks for itself, although Au Courant*'s headline is misleading.*

'Between the ages of seven and 16, I had two significant relationships with guys older than me: first at age seven with a lifeguard at the seashore; then with a man in his mid-40s. Both were very fulfilling, both were very rewarding, and neither was in any sense controlling or abusive. What both did do was provide role models for a kid who felt he was an oddity: seeing that these guys had friends, had jobs, had real lives let me know that although I was, in the eyes of most of society, a pariah, I too could lead a normal life.'

Maybe Sellers Is a Self-hating Pedophile

To the Editor:

Franklin Sellers writes in his article trashing man/boy love that NAMBLA wouldn't talk to him. I returned his phone call to NAMBLA promptly, but he never called back. My number is in the phone book. Maybe his answering machine ate my message, but it seems to me that Sellers never wanted to challenge the hatred and distortions with which he fills his piece.

Not only did Sellers not bother to talk to any men or boys who have actually loved (or even liked) each other, he didn't even check out the literature on the subject available at any gay bookstore. For a more balanced view, look at the *Journal of Homosexuality*'s anthology, *Male Intergenerational Intimacy*. Or, read the books by Dr. Theo Sandfort, head of gay studies at the University of Utrecht in Holland, who did his doctoral thesis by studying boys involved in relationships with men. The following dialogue between Sandfort and a 12-year-old boy, Wouter, is typical. Sandfort asks, "Who starts it?":

Wouter: I do, mostly.

Researcher: You start it?

W: I decide whether we are going to have sex.

R: You decide that?

W: Yes. And everyday I come here it happens. So Gerard [his 42-year-old friend] doesn't have to hang around waiting for it.

R: Is it a sort of rule that you do it every time?

W: No. I think it's nice. If I feel like it, we just begin. First we take a bath and then we go to bed, although sometimes we do it the other way around.

R: But if you had to say who starts it, now, who would that be, in general?

W: Well, we take turns. Sure, once in a while he wants to do it and I don't want to do it, and then we don't do it. Mainly, though, I make the first move. (from Theo Sandfort's *Sexual Aspects of Pedophile Relations*)

There have always been a handful of teenagers in NAMBLA. I'm 29 now, but I joined NAMBLA when I was 15, partly because I fancied boys and no other gay group was addressing the feelings I had, and partly because I was pissed off that the law said I couldn't have sex with my 24-year-old boyfriend, who I met at Gay and Lesbian Youth of New York. We had sex anyway, and it was a wonderful experience for this 14-year-old boy, from straight-laced Levittown, Long Island, who didn't know a single queer in his hometown.

My experience as a boy in NAMBLA has nothing whatever to do with the picture Sellers paints of the organization. Liking boys isn't just a matter of sex. Boy-lovers like hanging out with

boys, being affectionate with boys; they want to be liked by boys, and identify with boys. Many of the friendships I formed with the men I met in NAMBLA then continue to this day.

Sellers makes a total hash of my views on consent. He cites an article I wrote in the November, 1994 *NAMBLA Bulletin* to make the claim that I think tricking or manipulating boys into sex is just fine, that real consent doesn't matter. The point of my article was completely different: that people on both sides of the intergenerational sex debate have focused too much discussion on the abstract concept of consent, and too little attention on the specific, concrete ways that relationship between men and boys can be healthy and affirming or risky and hurtful. I was saying in the article that we don't need ever-more refined definitions of consent, but a more concrete understanding, rooted in people's experience, about the various ways man/boy relationships can be good and bad.

'People on both sides of the intergenerational sex debate have focused too much discussion on the abstract concept of consent, and too little attention on the specific, concrete ways that relationship between men and boys can be healthy and affirming or risky and hurtful. We don't need ever-more refined definitions of consent, but a more concrete understanding, rooted in people's experience, about the various ways man/boy relationships can be good and bad.'

If I really believed the things Sellers claims, then how come the Gay and Lesbian Press Association in 1990 named an article I wrote about consent for *The Guide* [a national gay monthly magazine published in Boston] as a finalist that year for "Best Feature Story?" Or why would writer Samuel Delany; speaking at Stonewall 25 last year, say, "I read the *NAMBLA Bulletin* fairly regularly, and I think it is one of the most intelligent discussions of sexuality I've ever found?"

Sellers claims to be writing about pedophilia, but he doesn't even know the definition of the

term. The American Psychiatric Association defines pedophilia as sexual attraction between an adult and a preadolescent child. To say that a magazine with photos of 16 to 21 year old youths is "catering to pedophiles" is preposterous.

By that standard, 95 percent of gay men, and most likely Franklin Sellers himself, are pedophiles—which could well be the fear that fuels all of Sellers's loathing.

Sincerely,
Bill Andriette
Editor, *NAMBLA Bulletin*

The final letter in this series published by Au Courant *appeared the next week in Volume 13, Number 16, February 21-27, 1995. Another nice letter. Note typical editor's insatiable desire to have the last word.*

The Last Word on the NAMBLA Controversy

To the Editor:

I read the ["Man/Boy Love"] article in *Au Courant* and the feedback it generated. I went to Giovanni's Room, asked for *Gayme* and the NAMBLA newsletter. I read the NAMBLA stuff and found it tame, the photos almost innocent. I do not understand the anger.

Children do indeed seek out adults for sexual experience, and much else. They must do so if they are to come to know what they might come to be. It is not new. That adults are faulted for manipulating children ignores the fact that if children do not copy some figment of adult imagination, they will reinvent it. Children lie, cheat, steal, seduce, and manipulate to the extent of murdering other children and adults. Children break hearts of children and adults, as adults break the hearts of adults and children. We are all victims of love, lust and passion, our own and others. And then there is something new in all this?

Mitchell D. Brown
Philadelphia

[*Au Courant*'s] Editor's Note: While it is true that we may all be vulnerable to our hearts Mr. Brown, adults should certainly take responsibility for their actions.

Not all letters to the editor are printed. One member sent us a letter he submitted to Au Courant *but never made it into their pages. It adds an interesting perspective.*

To the Editor,

The articles by Franklin Sellers which are purportedly "about" NAMBLA and man/boy love do a grave disservice to your readers. Sellers misrepresents lesbian and gay history, mischaracterizes NAMBLA's membership, and embraces a false medical

construct used by the homophobic right to divide our community.

NAMBLA was founded in response to an explicitly anti-gay campaign by an aging district attorney desperate for votes. The group grew out of a coalition which included every lesbian and gay group in Boston, and their purpose was to defend Boston's gay community against the DA's politically motivated anti-gay crusade following several prosecutions of gay men for consenting sex with adolescents. NAMBLA's founders, including openly gay youth, knew that relationships between male adolescents and older men have been a central element of Western gay culture (and not only Western) since the beginning of history. Their approach was to denounce age-of-consent laws, because at that time it was almost unheard of for the laws to be enforced against any other kind of relationship. They were used to imprison gay men, to harass gay youth, but almost never to stop abuse.

It was all too obvious that the laws were (and are) entirely ineffective and inappropriate for the prevention of rape, abuse, or exploitation. Clearly, if we are serious about stopping abuse, we need a different approach. These real problems are much more effectively addressed by dealing with the legal, social, and economic status of young people, and specifically by making

'Children break hearts of children and adults, as adults break the hearts of adults and children. We are all victims of love, lust and passion, our own and others. And then there is something new in all this?'

it possible for a young person to speak independently of adults. NAMBLA's vilification for stating these simple truths speaks volumes about American society.

The term "man/boy love" is derived from a word that, for many centuries, was used to describe all gay men in Europe. This word took into consideration the key role gays played in society. We were the artists, poets, philosophers, and, yes, the spiritual leaders of our communities, literally keeping the culture alive. In these roles, gays doubled as educators and socializers, particularly of boys with special aptitudes and/or family troubles. This changed with the industrial and technological revolutions. Economic forces removed adolescents from their traditional place beside (pre-factory) working adults and forced them into

schools and involuntary childhood, where, even now, they are kept until the last possible moment and then unleashed on the world unprepared and unsocialized. The extended family and working community were replaced by the factory, the nuclear family, and the family physician. Advocates of the industrial system quickly identified gay men as a problem, since they were prone to treat adolescents as something more than future employees and producers of offspring. The gay community was targeted, divided, and viciously attacked by doctors (as were women who identified as anything but baby factories, and youths who challenged the system in any way). This sent many gays running from their traditional identity as boy-lovers, redefining themselves according to the dictates of the common oppressors of women, gays, and youth.

When you are under full assault, it may be expected that you will run for the first exit you see. I believe the exits labeled "identity politics" and "scapegoat boy-lovers" are decoys set by the Right. Since we must ultimately all live together, the only true escape from homophobic attacks is to deny the attackers their weapons and their support, by exposing their mythology and demanding justice for all.

Sincerely,
David Miller

Try Your Hand!

One of the few forums left open for NAMBLA members are the editorial pages of newspapers and magazines. We need to reveal lies, distortions, and misrepresentations which occur all too frequently when man/boy love is exploited by politicians and sensationalist journalists. Letters to the editor don't have to be literary masterpieces. One or two letter writers can fill large voids in a newspaper's coverage.

The two main challenges are getting the letter printed, and writing it for maximum effect. The likelihood of a given letter being printed depends on the newspaper and the letter. In general, larger and more mainstream newspapers and magazines tend to print only the succinct, shorter letters that avoid appearing radical. We have had best success with local and regional lesbian and gay newspapers.

Most papers—even many gay papers—require the letter writer to sign the letter and give an address and telephone number. Don't let this scare you, but do take reasonable precautions. For example, don't write of sensitive personal experience.

To insure that your letter is printed, and with a minimum of editorial cuts, keep it short, and limit the focus to one or two topics. If you have a lot to say, send in separate letters, covering dif-

'One of the few forums left open for NAMBLA members are the editorial pages of newspapers and magazines. We need to reveal lies, distortions, and misrepresentations which occur all too frequently when man/boy love is exploited by politicians and sensationalist journalists. Letters to the editor don't have to be literary masterpieces. One or two letter writers can fill large voids in a newspaper's coverage.'

ferent material. Also, make sure the letter is relevant to something the paper has printed. Include a specific reference to a previous article, editorial, or letter. It might be a good idea to begin with a compliment, e.g. "The article by X was good, however..."

You will probably need to experiment to find the best length and rhetorical approach for a given newspaper or magazine. It's all too easy to run on too long, and tackle lots of related concerns all at once. Remember to divide and limit topics to fit a given opportunity. Your letter is more likely to be printed, whatever the opinion, if it fits the style of the publication you are writing. Remember not to attack anyone personally no matter how stupid or cruel their opinions may be. Write for the benefit of the readers of the publication.

If you have been searching for alternative modes of activism, or if you've been itching to respond to media distortions, take the initiative. It puts the spotlight back where it belongs, exposing injustice and examining the prejudices and motivations behind injustice. Good luck and happy writing. ■

— David Miller

For more information, contact the North American Man/Boy Love Association at:

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One-year subscription, US$25. Overseas mailing, add $15. Book catalog available upon request.